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A CURIOUS PROPOSITION IN 1776.

J. H. BURNHAM

Silas Deane was one of the greatest men of our revolutionary period, although by the end of the war he had unfortunately lost much of his early popularity. He was one of Connecticut's patriotic leaders who in 1775 planned the famous and brilliant capture of Fort Ticonderoga. The New York Historical Society's "Deane Papers," Vol. 1, 1886, has referred to the Ticonderoga affair as follows: "The money to equip the expedition was also procured by Mr. Deane and his associates who gave their personal notes for the sum advanced from the treasury of the colony."

Mr. Deane was one of the Connecticut delegates to the Continental Congress of 1774-1775, and his ability was so generally recognized that he became one of the most valuable members of that illustrious body. The congressional committee of secret correspondence appointed Mr. Silas Deane special agent to the French Court at Paris, where he labored with such success that when Benjamin Franklin and Arthur Lee were joined with Mr. Deane, the three commissioners had the pleasure on February 6, 1778, of entering into that world renowned treaty with the French government, by which France sent a large portion of its navy to aid the colonists with also the large detachment of its army.

Mr. Deane had furnished the arguments and prepared the way for this historic treaty during the two years in which he represented our colonies in France. His great services in this capacity have fully been made

known to the historical students of the present generation in the three volumes of the "Deane Papers" published by the New York Historical Society in 1886.

A perusal of these papers teaches us that Mr. Deane was one of the most politic and far seeing statesmen of the revolutionary era. His able and convincing arguments and "memoirs" to the French government are by these volumes made accessible to historical investigators.

His arguments in offering a tract of land almost exactly covering the present states of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, as security for a loan of several millions of money to aid the revolutionary cause, is found on pages 383 and 384, in Vol. 1, of the "Deane Papers," from which we make the following extracts, showing how Mr. Deane believed independence could be secured by a most novel and brilliant real estate transaction. Who can tell how much of the popularity of the Ordinance of 1787 may have had its origin in the magnificent scheme outlined by Silas Deane on December 1, 1776?

Residents of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois will be interested in the extract given below, which sets forth the remarkable proposition in such clear light that we almost wonder the plan proposed by Mr. Deane was not carried into effect. It may have been published and commented on at the time, and the idea of forming the northwest territory in 1787 may have had its origin in this remarkable proposition, which is certainly one of the curiosities of American history.

TO THE SECRET COMMITTEE OF CONGRESS.

PARIS, 1st December, 1776.

GENTLEMEN :

From these and other considerations on which I need not be minute, emigrations from Europe will be prodigious immediately on the establishment of American independancy. The consequence of this must be the rise of the lands already settled, and a demand for new or uncultivated land; on this demand I conceive a certain fund may now be fixed.

I trace the river Ohio from its junction to its head; thence north to Lake Erie; on the south and west of that lake to Fort Detroit which is in the latitude of Boston; thence a west course to the Mississippi, and return to the place of my departure. These three lines, of near one thousand miles each, include an immense territory, in a fine climate, well watered, and by accounts exceedingly fertile; it is not inhabited by any Europeans of consequence, and the tribes of Indians are inconsiderable, and will decrease faster than the lands can possibly be called for cultivation. To this I ask your attention as a resource amply adequate, under proper regulations, for defraying the whole expense of the war, and the sums necessary to be given the Indians in purchase of the native right. But to give this land value, inhabitants are necessary. I therefore propose, in the first place, that a grant be made of a tract of land at the mouth of the Ohio, between that and the Mississippi, equal to two hundred miles square, to a company formed indiscriminately of Europeans and Americans, which company should form a distinct state, confederated with and under the general regulations of the United States General of America. That the Congress of the United States shall, out of such grant, reserve the defraying or discharging the public debts or expenses; one-fifth part of all the lands, mines, &c., within said tract, to be disposed of by the Congress in such manner as good policy and the publick exigencies may dictate, the said one-fifth to be sequestered out of every grant or settlement made by the company, of equal goodness with the rest of such grant or settlement. The company, on their part, shall engage to have in seven years after the passing of such grant one thousand families settled on said grant, and civil government regulated and supported on the most free and liberal principles, taking therein the advice of the honorable Congress of the United States of North America. They shall, also, from and after their having one thousand families as above mentioned, contribute

their proportion of the publick expenses of the Continent or United States, according to the number of their inhabitants, and shall be entitled to a voice in Congress, as soon as they are called on thus to contribute. The company shall at all times have the preference of purchasing the Continental or common interest thus reserved, when it shall be offered for sale. The company shall consist, on giving the patent or grant, of at least one hundred persons.

These are the outlines of a proposed grant, which you see contains more than 25,000,000 acres of land, the one-fifth of which, if a settlement is carried on vigorously, will soon be of most prodigious value. At this time a company might be formed in France, Germany, &c., who would form a stock of one hundred thousand pounds sterling, to defray the expense of this settlement. By such a step, you, in the first place, extend the circle of your connexion and influence. You increase the number of your inhabitants, proportionably lessen the common expense, and have in the reserve a fund for publick exigencies. Further, as this company would be in a great degree commercial, the establishing commerce at the junction of these large rivers, would immediately give a value to all the lands situate on or near them within the above extensive description, and further grants might admit of larger reserves, amply sufficient for defraying the expenses of the war, and possibly for establishing funds for other important purposes. It may be objected that this is not a favorable time for such a measure. I reply that it is the most favorable that can happen. You want money, and by holding up thus early to view a certain fund on which to raise it, even the most certain in the world, that of land security, you may obtain the loan and engage the monied interest of Europe in your favor. I have spoken with many persons of good sense on this subject, which makes me the more sanguine.